

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## PRESS RELEASE

Address by

**MS. GEETA PASI, CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES, A.I.**  
**Cotton Council International License Award Ceremony**  
**Dhaka**



CDA, a.i. Geeta Pasi attends the 'Cotton Council International License Award Ceremony' held at Bay's Galleria, Gulshan, Dhaka on Tuesday, February 05, 2008

**DHAKA, FEBRUARY 5 --** Following is the text of remarks of U.S. Chargé D'affaires, a.i. Geeta Pasi at Cotton Council International License Award Ceremony in Dhaka on Tuesday, February 5.

(begin text)

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be able to participate in this award ceremony. Cotton is one of the top U.S. exports to Bangladesh, so I'm happy to recognize today two Bangladesh firms for their commitment to maintaining the high production standards required for a COTTON USA license. Square Spinings and Malek Spinning Mills are key actors in one of Bangladesh's most important industries. The fact that these companies are licensed to use the COTTON USA mark illustrates the worldwide competitiveness of Bangladesh's textiles industry.

Textiles and apparel are key sectors for Bangladesh exports and the country's economy generally. High quality U.S. cotton can greatly improve the quality of ready-made garments produced in Bangladesh. I hope that U.S. cotton can continue to be the cotton of choice for fabric producers here.

As members of a key industry, textiles and apparel producers clearly have a vested interest in political and economic developments currently taking place in Bangladesh. I would like to take this opportunity to make a few comments about the challenges Bangladesh faces at this time.

A lot has happened in the last year. The Caretaker Government has taken up an ambitious agenda and has faced some difficult hurdles. Much of what the government is trying to achieve is critical to the long-term health of Bangladesh's economy, including the textiles and apparel sector. The government needs to continue its efforts in a variety of areas, in particular preparing for elections, tackling corruption and safeguarding basic rights. These efforts require the support and participation of the business community.

The government's election preparations impacts investors. Investment often does not happen in a state of uncertainty. The government needs to adhere to the election roadmap to ensure elections by the end of the year. The more it can show its commitment to the roadmap, the greater confidence investors will have in Bangladesh. To date, the caretaker government has voiced repeatedly its commitment to the roadmap, and most of the roadmap milestones are being met in a timely fashion. This must continue so as to boost investor confidence and give business greater certainty.

The caretaker government has also tackled corruption. A long term decline in corruption will give business the confidence to invest in Bangladesh. However, less corruption is not the only goal. Anti-corruption campaigns must be carried out in a fair and transparent manner. A lack of fairness or transparency may make investors nervous about whether their ventures will be subject to investigation.

While it is true that Bangladesh is in a State of Emergency, fundamental human rights should not be ignored. These rights include the rights of workers. It is important that workers have the ability constructively voice their views -- otherwise there is the real danger of worker dissatisfaction spilling into the streets.

Government, industry and labor have already been working together in Bangladesh to protect the rights of workers. However, more dialogue among Bangladesh's key labor stakeholders could bring additional stability -- stability that would enhance Bangladesh's economic opportunities.

Labor rights are a key component of international trade today. The U.S. Government is studying a request made by a U.S. labor organization to review Bangladesh's eligibility for the Generalized System

of Preferences, also known as the GSP. The GSP gives preferential tariffs to certain goods Bangladesh exports to the United States.

More broadly, the U.S. Government recognizes Bangladesh's interest in obtaining duty-free access to US markets for Bangladesh's garment exports. Throughout the world, in all of our free-trade agreements, the US Government position is consistent: the condition for special trade benefits is the protection of worker rights and the freedom of association.

The U.S. government provides support to Bangladesh in its efforts to improve the rights of its workers. We look forward to continuing our support in this important area. Labor groups and apparel industry representatives in the United States also seek to assist Bangladesh in protecting worker rights. However, these goals can ultimately only be accomplished by Bangladesh's Government, industry and labor representatives working together constructively.

Business, and industries like yours, have a role to play in helping the government achieve its goals. Investors living and working in Bangladesh need to continue to support the government's efforts to reach elections by the end of 2008. Business needs to provide constructive feedback to the government on its anti-corruption and reform efforts. And business needs to work with government and other groups to preserve fundamental human rights, including the rights of workers.

Bangladesh is full of economic opportunities. Congratulations to Square Spinings and Malek Spinning Mills for capitalizing on these opportunities and for being good business partners with the United States. I hope that by working together government and business can continue to create opportunities to boost Bangladesh's economy. Thank you for inviting me to this award ceremony today, and I wish you success in your business endeavors.

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*As prepared for delivery.*

**GR/ 2008**

Filename: 05\_feb\_08\_CDA\_Cotton\_Council.doc  
Directory: S:\ISC\Anowar  
Template: C:\Documents and Settings\dhkadmela\i\Application  
Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dot  
Title: Address by Ms  
Subject:  
Author: vrampasah  
Keywords:  
Comments:  
Creation Date: 2/5/2008 3:21:00 PM  
Change Number: 2  
Last Saved On: 2/5/2008 3:21:00 PM  
Last Saved By: hoqueax  
Total Editing Time: 4 Minutes  
Last Printed On: 2/5/2008 3:26:00 PM  
As of Last Complete Printing  
Number of Pages: 3  
Number of Words: 895 (approx.)  
Number of Characters: 4,961 (approx.)